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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

March 31, 197

PARTICIPANTS: Roberto Ares, Peronist politician; ex-Minister of Economy; ex-Minister of Interior
Patricia Derian, D/HA
Fernando Rondon, ARA/ECA
Anthony G. Freeman, POL, Ambassador Buenos Aires

PLACE: U. S. Embassy, Buenos Aires

DISTRIBUTION: Ambassador Hill

(Ex-Senate Provisional President Italo Luder and ex-Foreign Minister Angel Robledo also agreed to participate in the meeting, but they failed to fulfill the commitment.)

Ares went to some lengths to describe the present relationship between the political parties and the government. The two largest parties--the Peronists and the Radicals--maintained close contact with each other and carried out a dialogue with members of the Armed Forces and the government. However, the dialogue was strictly on an unofficial basis among personal friends of long standing. Moreover, Ares asserted, the Peronists have been responding to initiatives from their military contacts rather than initiating these conversations themselves.

Ares described the internal structure of the Peronist p-rty, stating that various work groups had been organized to assess the current situation and plan for the future. Ms. Derian asked whether a special unit had been established to service requests from their constituents for help in human rights cases. Ares said that he personally received numerous requests for assistance in obtaining information from the authorities concerning the whereabouts of arrest or kidnap victims, but no organic structure existed for this purpose.

Ares then went on to reveal his basic misunderstanding of the human rights issue as perceived in the United States. He stated he understood that the US was not singling out Argentina; rather, the policy was aimed primarily against the Soviet Union. He was aghast, however, that a special US Congressional Committee would be set up to investigate Argentina (sic). Ares claimed that he long had been an admirer of the US. During World War II he advocated the Allied cause and closer ties with the US. However, the US had an ambassador in Argentina after the War who did irreparable harm to US-Argentina relations. Ambassador Braden appeared to place himself in the position of supporting Argentina's landholding oligarchical minority against the Peronist masses. Moreover, the traditional US policy of favoring Brazil over Argentina appeared to be part of the same strategy of keeping Argentina essentially an agrarian raw materials producer and preventing it from developing into an industrialized nation. Now, the US had adopted a

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policy of advocating human rights, but here again Argentina was the principal target, whereas Brazil--which had a much worse record than Argentina in terms of abuses--appeared not to be the subject of US sanctions.

Ms. Derian addressed herself forcefully to these assertions. The weaving of human rights into the fabric of our foreign policy was part of a process of rededicating ourselves afresh to the basic traditions on which our country was founded and did not respond to any attempt to seek short-term political advantage vis-a-vis any particular country. No country was being singled out in the applications of this universal policy. It was by chance that the US directed itself first to the Soviet Union; events were taking place there just at the time that our decision to pursue that policy had been reached and we had no choice but to direct our attention to the violations occurring at the time. There had been no special committee set up in Congress to deal solely with the Argentine problem. The standing committees of Congress organized their legislative and investigative work in accordance with the issues of the day as perceived by the American people. Moreover, Ms. Derian doubted that the US had pursued a policy of favoritism vis-a-vis Brazil. It was more likely that the American people suffered from a basic misunderstanding of Latin America as a whole.

Ares appeared taken aback by the strength of the response and he retreated. He said he thought that the Videla government understood the need to exercise control over the security apparatus and that it had begun in the past few weeks to move in this direction. He had no doubt that this was a result of the US reduction in FMS credits (although his party had to oppose our sanctions policy). Nevertheless, violations continued. Just the other day an unarmed man was pulled out of a coffee shop by four plainclothesmen who then machinegunned him to death in a busy downtown intersection. A mob gathered for hours to protest this totally unnecessary act of violence by individuals assumed by everyone to be security agents until it was dispersed by an Army patrol which arrived on the scene.

POL:AGFreeman:jr

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